

Forum

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ABSTRACT LABOUR

By E. Wilmott

RECAPITULATION

"Social Relations of Production" were mentioned in the last issue, by which was meant the way individuals stand to each other in the social productive process. In present society, labour power has become a commodity - bought and sold like any other commodity - through a long historic process. This presupposes sellers of the commodity labour-power (the workers) and buyers of the commodity (capitalists). These constitute the social productive relations. They are relations because one is a necessary condition of the other.

The relation between men - capitalists and workers - assumes then an exchange relation. Allowing for fluctuations in the labour market, the worker gets the value of his labour-power and this exchange relation is then a relation of value equivalence. But the worker produces surplus value which is that other part of value appropriated by the capitalist. The value of the products of labour include then the value of labour-power and surplus value. The relation between buyers and sellers of labour power is then a value relation or a relation between men; expressing itself as a relation between commodities - or things. This constitutes what Marx called the social relations of production of capitalism.

It was also shown that capitalism, being a universal system of commodity production (the producing of use values for others) achieves a degree of social economic organisation distinguishing it from all other modes of production, and because exchange relations via the market are the means realising the aim and purpose of production - profit, the highly autonomous character of the system, imposes upon the products of capitalism via the fluctuations of market price, a value principle which determines the ratio in which commodities exchange for each other.

It was also pointed out that the social character of production impressed upon commodities a social character. Hence the value which a commodity embodies must be a social value. Utility, being the property of the material and tangible make-up of a commodity, and constituting a personal relation between the consumer and the object of utility, does not directly involve a social category. That is why Marx deliberately excluded utility from the investigation of political economy.

ECONOMIC CATEGORIES

All economic categories (wages, capital value, etc.) are social categories. In spite of the mistaken notions of anti-

marxists and some would be marxists, nature given material and technical aids to production are not - repeat are not - economic categories. "A horse, a bullock, or any aid to production" said Marx, in his reply to Proudhon, "is not an economic category; it is a productive force". Yet there are still members of the party who confuse productive forces with economic categories. From that premise it is easy to assume that these productive forces are capable of some principle of self-motivation, accounting for all human and historical development. Such a view of historical materialism excludes both history and humans. This incidentally is the favourite Aunt Sally of anti-marxists.

In the last article we spoke of value as a quality of a certain historic form of social production, or, what comes to the same thing, that qualitatively it is a social relation between men which expresses itself quantitatively as an exchange relation between things (i.e. commodities).

LABOUR AND LABOUR POWER

If then value is a social quality, what constitutes the substance and magnitude of this quality? The answer is labour, but we must be careful to understand what we mean by this. First of all we must take note of the fact that labour itself (as Marx points out in the first chapter of Capital) is not a value. We may add that it only becomes the substance of value under given historic conditions of production.

A moment's reflection will show us why labour itself is not a value. A proposition or thing cannot be explained or measured in terms of itself. It can only be explained with reference to some other term through which it has some common or crucial connection: that is why Marx sought some uniform or homogenous substance, which although not itself value, would enable the values of commodities in exchange to be expressed.

One thing which allowed Marx to give a precision to his proposition of labour as the source and measure of value in a way which Adam Smith and even Ricardo had failed to do, was his separation of labour and labour power. Marx regarded this as one of his major contributions to political economy.

For Marx, 'labour-power' was a commodity bought and sold on the market like any other commodity, and labour an objective representation and standard of productive activity (and hence a means of determining the value of the commodity labour-power itself).

This separation of labour and labour-power also supplied a number of key variables to capitalist economic organisation - the mass of surplus value; rate of surplus value; mass of profit; rate of profit. From this Marx was able to enumerate the scope and limits of capitalist investing propensities.

Finally the separation of labour from labour-power enabled Marx to show, in a way not achieved by Ricardo, the way social wealth was distributed. Marx, like Ricardo, believed that the main task of political economy was to show the source and alloca-

tion of revenue among the different social sections.

One might note the correspondence between Marx's analysis and the actualities of capitalism.

SOCIAL LABOUR

Marx's treatment of labour being the measure and substance of value is the gist of his opening chapter in Capital.

Labour as an expenditure of productive effort must, like a commodity, be looked at from two aspects - that is, as useful labour, and value producing labour. As useful labour it is a particular and concrete form of productive activity such as bricklaying, carpentry, baking, etc. This useful labour corresponds to the use value of a commodity. Thus when a tailor makes a coat, it is useful labour turning out a use value; i.e. satisfying some particular want.

But a coat under given historic conditions is also a commodity, and hence the embodiment of a value, exchangeable for another or other values. And the production of value, with its corollary surplus value, is the purpose of capitalist production. The coat as the embodiment of value, means that we must disregard its use value and in that case the useful labour which has gone to make it. No longer must we regard it as a special kind of labour, viz. coat, but as value producing labour, materialised in a good or article of wealth.

Put another way, we can regard this value producing labour as the expenditure of human brain, muscle and nerve under definite productive conditions - production of commodities. The purpose of this expenditure of productive energy being the production of value, it does not matter from the standpoint of its value creating function what particular form it is materialised in- viz, coat, linen, bread etc.

If productive energy under given historical conditions (i.e. social labour) has a value creating function, regardless of the particular form (i.e. utilities) in which it is materialised, then we must see it as general labour; as uniform expenditure of brain, muscle and nerve. Hence we abstract the particular differences which mark one form of useful concrete labour from another. This is what Marx means by abstract homogenous labour.

Anti-marxist economists have in unison complained "How can there be such a thing as abstract undifferentiated labour; this concept is pure abstraction". To be sure it is an abstraction at a high level, but it is the type of abstraction necessary to grasp the essence of capitalist society. So we can see that what use value is to value in the case of the commodity, useful labour is to abstract labour in the case of productive activity.

There is no mystery then about abstract labour; it is only abstract in the sense that all special properties or characteristics which distinguish one kind of useful labour from another are ignored and so we arrive at labour in general.

We are able to see then that we are able to reduce all labour to a common denominator, which was what Marx did in terms of socially necessary units. In this way we can compare one unit of labour with another. We can also aggregate in this way the social labour force. This is not then a mere abstraction but a key to the understanding of capitalist society.

First of all we must remember that capitalist society is characterised by a higher degree of labour mobility than any previous social system. Not only do workers change their jobs frequently, but when one industry is declining and another expanding, workers are diverted from one to another. We see then that in capitalist society there is a general labour force which can be directed as the occasion demands into various forms of productive activity, i.e. from tailoring to weaving, from mechanical engineering to electrical engineering; from mining to motor car production, and so on. As Marx says this change may not take place without friction, but take place it must.

Thus the specific kinds of labour, e.g. tailoring or weaving, are of secondary importance to the general needs of present day society. What is important to capitalist society is its total labour force, and of course, the degree of the historical development it has undergone. On these depend the productive capacities and powers of society. You will notice that we are not talking now of the specific kinds of labour, i.e. the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, because in dealing with the general labour force of society we have abstracted from the useful and concrete kinds of labour.

When the Production Census of 1940 required various people trained to do various jobs, it was the general labour force at their disposal with which they were concerned. Upon its size and historic development depended whether they could achieve their aims. The question of training was secondary and subsidiary.

If of course labour of different kinds could not be reduced to a quantitative form, then mobility of labour would be impossible, and so would capitalism. This conclusion commands a general acceptance to-day, and yet there are economists who still refer to Marx's concept of abstract labour as Hegelian metaphysics and hocus-pocus.

We can say then that the reduction of all labour to abstract labour allows us to see behind the different concrete forms which labour assumes at any given time, and see the total labour force as capable of being transferred from the production of one use value to another in accordance with social need.

We are now in a position to see what is meant when we say abstract labour is the substance of value.

In the next issue we shall deal further with the qualitative and quantitative aspects of labour and labour power.

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DIG THAT CRAZY AD-MAN !

By A.W.Ivimey

One of the few pleasures of descending to the 'horrors of the choob' (in fact the only pleasure that I can think of) is the succession of busty posters advertising the more intimate items of female attire, which spring into view when one descends the escalator, only to spring out again. Of course these have their disadvantages from the point of view of the organisation of an efficient transport system, for the occasional keen type who walks up the down escalator in order to keep level with a particularly choice example of this trend, has a disasterously disconcerting effect upon the people going the other way. Medically too, this institution presents problems, as witness the number of cricked necks and the black eyes which arise from heads being sharply turned into the elbow of the fellow behind.

A particularly fetching series of this type of poster has recently appeared, causing heads to twitch like a puppet-show. This series depicts the trance-like state induced by the wearing of a particular type of brassiere, and the posters are accompanied by captions which admirably drive home the point of the picture. One sultry vamp in the minimum of draperies says "I dreamt that I was a social butterfly in my Blonup bra"; or another, showing a gay young thing belting along at top speed in her underwear - "I dreamt that I raced the wind in my Blonup bra". Perhaps the most charming shows a woodland nymph, in bra and panties, who, while dreaming no doubt of being raped by Pan, says "I dreamt I had Spring Fever in my Blonup bra".

If one reflects on this kind of thing, one can hardly fail to be impressed by the sheer genius and flair for detail evinced by the advertising copy writers, and others concerned in the production of this little bit of culture and joy-of-living thrown to us poor dull mortals to cheer our drab lives. The production conferences of the organisations responsible for such praiseworthy objects as selling soap to tramps or vacuum-cleaners to people without carpets must be real congresses of giants of intellect. The possibilities that this vision presents are unlimited, and have suggested the following drama, written in a form for which I feel there is overwhelming apathy:-

SCENE The advertising production conference of Itch Unlimited, the giant undies combine.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Rumpelstiltskin - the big boss of the woolly mens department.

Footloose, - the advertising manager of Itch Unlimited.

Euphoria and Vertigo
 = the two best ad-brains in the business.

Rumpelstiltskin Well, men, you know our problem. To find a new gimmick in advertising to launch our "Reachmedowns", the super non-iron, non-shrink non-stretch, non-wash, non-wearable woolly combs.

Vertigo Trouble is, the public are tired of gimmicks.

breakfast cereal people brought out really killed the new approach in underground posters.

Euphoria Killed the customers, too.

Footloose Yeah, definitely overdone. What the public wants is something simple and down-to-earth, and yet something that punches home.

Rumpelstiltskin That's it, but it's got to have genius, like our "Invisible Panties", line. What a stroke! "So sheer, so caressing, so flimsy, that you can't even see them."

Euphoria Cheap on production costs, too.

Footloose Too true. The yarn for that stuff only cost us $\frac{1}{2}$ d per pound, which was the cost of the spools.

Rumpelstiltskin Now, now, men, don't let us dwell on past glories. Remember the firm's motto:-

(All kneel)

"Ever onward, ever upward, more undies for the proles means more lolly for the boys."

All Amen.

Vertigo How about that old "I dreamt" line ? Hasn't been used for years.

Euphoria A bit passe, don't you think ?

Footloose I don't know. We mustn't let the search for new ideas blind us to the good old ones. Give it a new twist and it might work.

Vertigo How about this ? An old boy in his combs. in the middle of a line of Folies Bergere girls, tripping the light fantastic, his grey hair and beard fluttering in the breeze. Caption- "I dreamt I danced the Can-Can in my Reachmedowns"

Euphoria Great stuff for the pensioners.

Footloose Not bad, not at all bad.

Rumpelstiltskin Well that's a start, anyway. But we've got to develop a series with general appeal.

Euphoria Here's one for the sporty business-man. A baby-faced man-about-town, in woollies and suspenders, with a bowler jauntily over one-eye, taking guard at the wicket with his broolly, surrounded by a ring of fielders. Caption - "I dreamt that I played for England in my Reachmedowns."

Vertigo Oh boy, that'll slay them at Lords and Old Trafford.

Footloose How about one for the ham-handed son of the toil ?

Rumpelstiltskin Well, I see it something like this. A short fellow in a cloth cap, his face lined by a

(cont.)

Manager in a plushy office, with the factory and whirring machinery visible through a glass wall in the background. Spiel - "I dreamt I got my rise in my Reachmedowns".

Vertigo Well, it's a good notion, but it seems a trifle forced.

Rumpelstiltskin (Ominously) How's that, Vertigo? I think that you up-and-coming boys had better remember who are the real brains behind this outfit.

Vertigo Oh, sure. Don't think I was criticising or anything, I was just going on to say that what the public needed was something that was forced, you know, something that will take them out of themselves.

Rumpelstiltskin That's O.K., then.

Euphoria I'll run this one up the flag-pole and see if anyone salutes it. It's for the poor. A seedy prole in his combs sits at a desk, faced by a flint-faced geezer with a Saville Row suit. The seedy fellow's toes are sticking out of his boots, and he twists a battered hat between his fingers. On the window of the office is the inscription "Dotheboys Finance Co., We lend from £10. to £10,000 on your note of hand alone".

Vertigo If it's on the window it would read "oC eananiF syobehtoD".

Footloose Now then, don't let us be pedantic. Go on Boy, it sounds as if it has possibilities.

Euphoria (in a sulky tone) He's not so clever, what about the time when he sent out all those stocking ads which began "Do you want a stockingful for Christmas?" He made the firm a laughing stock.

Vertigo We had record sales that Christmas.

Rumpelstiltskin For Christ's sake shut up squabbling, and get on with the ad.

Euphoria Well, old flint-face is just throwing across the desk an enormous wad of fivers. Caption - "I dreamt that I raised the wind in my Reachmedowns"

Footloose Great, simply great! It has the right touch of fantasy, combined with a possibility that every poor sod dreams about.

Rumpelstiltskin (Kindly) Yes, my boy, I must compliment you. Thanks to you our new series should be a great hit. They have everything - dignity, homely fun, punch, and polish. Let us drink to the success of Reachmedowns.

Footloose (producing whiskey and glasses) Well, men, once more Itch Unlimited have shown their mettle. The best brains, the best products, and the lowest-paid workers in the business - an unbeatable

be a great sub-heading for the poster series.

Rumpelstiltskin Yes, indeed. Well Gentlemen, I give you a toast - To the underclothing of the proles; to the glory of advertising; to the continued success of Itch; and to the fattening of our wallets.

All Amen to that.

(Curtain)

VALUE AND EXCHANGE VALUE

By J. D'Arcy

Wealth in Capitalist society is the sum of commodities, the commodity representing the cell form of Capitalism containing Use Value & Exchange Value.

Use Value represents the utility of an article which is eventually lost in consumption. Exchange Value or Price is the proportion in which commodities exchange with each other. A commodity must be capable of being reproduced, and the cost of its reproduction is determined by the amount of time society spends on it. The kernel of the Labour Theory of Value lies in the fact that human labour is the value-forming material, provided that it is useful labour and that the resulting products are necessary to society. (The term 'human labour' and 'socially necessary labour' for the present purpose may be treated as synonymous.)

Human labour is the common element of all commodities, and to Marx must go the credit for discovering the social character of that labour. This social relation known as Value existing between the various products of labour.

Individual production, if there ever was such a thing, has long since passed, and social production is the rule. The sub-division of labour has made it impossible to trace the origin or the source of manufacture of any one commodity, or group of commodities. No-one in modern society has any overall co-ordinated purpose in any field of production, whether it is the manufacture of motor cars, food, or the building of houses. By 'co-ordinated', I mean that there is an overall scheme which will aim at getting these products to the consumers, and interweaving the production between the various groups of producers. This applies to every commodity in any field of production. No one produces for another, everyone produces for the market. Naturally, production on account of this has no set purpose apart from the market.

It is often puzzling to wonder how, despite this planlessness of production, that commodities exchange on the basis of the amount of labour time spent on them by society.

Looking at a desk no one can tell how much socially necessary labour time is contained in it, and yet this must be found if we are to get behind the general law affecting the sale or exchange of commodities.

Socially necessary labour time is the important qualification made by Marx when he discusses the labour time theory of value. Some of the critics of Marx missed the importance of this and accused him of saying that the more time society spends on the production of any commodity ipso facto the more valuable it becomes.

Socially necessary labour time means the average time that is spent in any field of production or distribution for the manufacture of any article. For example - a very old example, if coal were transferred from the Kent coalfields to the Newcastle coalfields, the cost of society's time used up in the transport of that coal could not be added to the product, because that would have been unnecessary labour as coal can be obtained in Newcastle. Again, if some group of Capitalists decided to erect a factory on the island of Tristan da Cunha, or some other remote island, say for the manufacture of textiles, the cost of the textiles produced would not have a greater value on account of the cost of shipment, handling and other transport charges, for the obvious reason, that the average practice of producing textiles is in concentrated industrial areas with all the attendant services of railways, roads, etc. Again, although this example may be open to some question, if a firm decided to build hansom cabs drawn by horses to replace taxi cabs, then apart from the novelty value (which would soon wear off) the social time spent on these would be quite valueless, as this commodity (transport) by horsedrawn carriage is obsolete, and is not used by society. The socially necessary labour time must take into consideration the things which society now does and the methods which it uses, in the course of its average working.

This average working, raises another question and that is whether by using the latest machinery the value of the products produced by the most highly developed machinery is less than those produced by old machinery, because the time spent on the former is naturally less. The answer is that we have to take the average throughout the whole field of production. In the coal mining industry throughout the world the methods of extracting coal vary from 'working narrow' seams by hand, to exploiting huge faces by coal cutting machinery. The hand-cut coal is not more valuable, and in any case, the entire production of coal cannot be carried on by hand, neither can it be carried on entirely by machinery - therefore the average mean is a mixture between the two. Again, if we took ten firms with varying degrees of efficiency, say from 1 - 10, then the average would be 5, which is the middle course.

Socially necessary labour time is the substance of Value, or conversely, Value has for its substance embodied or congealed labour.

Value has not existed for all time; it is a social relation and consequently it is determined by social conditions. The obvious question is what kind of a social relation is Value?

And what kind of social conditions bring it into existence? The answer to these questions is to be found in its substance - congealed (or expended) labour power. Congealed labour power represents the activities of men engaged in production, which is social. The sub-division of labour has destroyed individual production, so any commodity must contain an assortment of different kinds of human industrial activities, which manifest themselves in the final product. Leaving aside, for the time being the part played by nature in the field of production, what we are actually doing when we exchange commodities is exchanging different kinds of human labour. So Value therefore consists of the process of relating one man's labour to another man's labour. This relationship can only exist in a society which is concerned with this relationship because it has to measure the time, duration and intensity of this social labour, and its method of doing this is when the different kinds of labour congealed in the multifarious commodities parade themselves on the market. Remember, things exchange with each other for two reasons, because, first they are different (that is qualitatively) and secondly, in proportion to the labour power congealed in them (that is quantitatively).

Reverting to the desk, let us attempt to trace its origin as far as is reasonably possible. The tree-feller when he cut wood was in all probability, unaware that he was cutting it for the desk. He charged his time, or his boss did, and one must bear in mind that surplus value is included in socially necessary labour time, and consequently the surplus product. He sells it to the timber merchant; the timber merchant machines it, dries it, uses certain machinery, and after taking into consideration all his costs, sells it to the wood factory. Already you can see the hundreds of processes which are embodied in this, even at this stage. The wood factory fashions it into a desk, together with hundreds of other desks and possibly other office furniture during the period of manufacture. He sells it to the retailer: the retailer warehouses it and arranges for its storage, display, and advertisement. The retailer then calculates his time, and eventually the product is sold to the consumer. Whilst each of the individual basic producers could give you their costings in relation to the purchase of timber, manufacture, and its ultimate marketing, they could not give any data which would truly represent the amount of socially necessary labour spent in the desk, for the simple reason that there are processes such as transport, machine making, coalmining to make machinery, and in fact the whole nuclear chain of social productive relations, over which he has no control.

And yet, when the desk appears on the market, it will declare the law of its origin and confront any other commodity with its inalienable right to be exchanged in proportion to the socially necessary labour contained within it. Goods will always find their value, in the same way as water will always find its level. Remember the desk is a finished product, ready for final consumption and consequent extinction. Not all products are in this category. The wood in the desk may have formed the substance of a whole chain of commodities.

Now this mysterious power of the commodity to confront others and exchange in given proportions was described by Marx as the 'fetishism of the commodity'. Their mysterious power to join men together apparently determines man's social being.

happens is - there is a relationship of things to other things with mankind looking on and not participating. Society is the force which brings the various types of labour together. This force works quite independently of the individual will of men; it causes, in the first instance, people to work for each other on the basis of primitive communist production; in the second instance (in Capitalist production) each person apparently works for himself, and the manner in which he obtains the product of other people does not seem to him to be attributable to the social character of their labour, but to the peculiarities of the product itself. There seems to be certain mystical qualities about the products in Capitalist society which predetermine their exchange in certain proportions. So long as production in the past was directly socialized it was subject to the decisions and directions of society. Everybody was conscious of the need to work for each other, and consequently the relations of the producers were direct. Production was planned, and under the control of society. There was no mystery about the products, they came into existence when society, through the direct participation of men, determined that they would come into existence, and each allocated to the other and sub-divided the various tasks required for their production.

Commodity production removes this. Individuals work independently of each other. Production becomes plan-less, and the relations of the producers now appear as the relations of products. When this happens it means that society no longer controls its products, and is in fact no longer controlled by the social relations existing between the producers. So that the social power in society, the relations between the products, grows over the heads of men. They follow and do not lead. To the simple intelligences of the past centuries they seem to be divine powers, and to the enlightened centuries they seem to be the powers of nature. The fetishism of a commodity is production where everybody is producing for a market, which nobody knows, and which, by some mysterious means, misunderstood by all except socialists, turns society upside down, controls men's lives from top to bottom, and has in fact introduced an almost supernatural criticism of socialism along the lines of 'human nature'. Human nature arguments arise as a direct result of the fetishistic character of commodity production.

The exchange Value or the price of a commodity is determined by its value and although the two do not always coincide, in the general run this law is pretty well observed. To take an example - the tides rise and fall, there is high tide and low tide, but there is a certain mean level. Another example is the banjo string which is fixed between two points. When the finger plucks the string; we cannot determine the vibrations but we know that they are governed by the fixed string. The vibrations represent supply and demand. Now everybody knows when goods are scarce prices rise, and the reverse happens when they are plentiful. But the starting off point for the rise or the fall is the Value of the article to begin with. Supply and demand are two fluctuating forces, and somewhere along the line they eventually balance each other and can exert no influence one way or other. When this paralysis occurs, when supply is equal to demand, we are bound to rely upon Value to express the price. There are other factors influencing exchange Value, and if you remember the famous statement by Marx in Value Price and Profit that 'goods exchange at their value except where monopoly conditions exist', you will see what appear to be permanent exceptions to this rule. In

France and England flour for the baking of bread is subsidised, which means that bread is, for the time being, sold below its value in these countries. On the other hand, petrol and cigarettes, carrying as they do an Excise duty, are sold above their value. In the normal competitive running of free Capitalist production these things would be sold at their value, as they are in other countries, particularly America and certain parts of the Continent, but they are able to be sold above their value in this country because the Government enjoys a monopoly of their production. They are able to do this because of certain historical and exceptional circumstances. There is no substitute for petrol or cigarettes or alcohol. Capitalism naturally cannot run on monopoly any more than it can run on subsidy.

It should be made clear that when we talk of goods being sold below their value, we do not mean that they are being sold at a loss. Remember that socially necessary labour also contains the unpaid labour of the worker, so that when goods are sold below their value it usually means that they have not realised the average rate of profit. In relation to my earlier mention of the intensity of labour, it should be remembered that discussing socially necessary labour time, a skilled worker, or skill itself no matter what its degree, is the compression of a whole series of simple processes crystallised in the final skill, so that in fact skilled labour is simple labour intensified.

The most famous, or infamous section of the exchange of commodities is the exchange of the commodity labour power - the ability to work, which observes the same laws regarding its production and re-production as any other commodity. The value of the labourer is determined by his cost of re-production. The greater amount of socially necessary time spent on training him for a necessary job the more valuable he becomes. This again is subject to the laws relating to obsolete methods of production, obsolete products, and obsolete skills. For example Capitalist society has spent thousands of pounds in the training of certain kinds of Aeronautical experts. The advent of the rocket and other discoveries have rendered their skills obsolete, which means they are valueless. A bank manager requires a prolonged training and has to carry a heavier responsibility than a bricklayer, therefore Bank Managers have more value. University students training for careers require lots of social time spent on their studies and generally command higher salaries always bearing in mind of course, that what they are doing is socially essential. As in the case of other commodities it does not follow that when these various professional skills, such as Bank managers, architects or chemists, offer themselves for sale in the labour market, they automatically receive their value. They are subject to the laws of supply and demand, and in general having no strong Trade Union movement to enforce their value, they tend to lag behind.

In discussing the re-production of the worker in his particular job, this is two-fold. Re-production in the family sense, as he has to be born, and re-production in the technical sense, his social training. Always remember that labour power is the one commodity which produces more than its cost of re-production. The accumulation of Capital is based on the fact that with the social growth of the means of production, the social surplus grows apace. This accumulated labour of the working class serves as Capital to exploit future generations of workers. This, as Marx puts it, is indeed the dead hand of the past weighing heavily like an alp on the body of the living and mind.

In the October "Forum", Comrade Trotman occupied 4½ columns to put his criticisms of statements made about rent control. At the end of it the reader may still wonder exactly what Comrade Trotman proposes that the party should do about rent control.

First let us remove some confusion created by Comrade Trotman. He criticises an article written by me: fair enough. But he also refers to a statement that was drafted for the E.C. by the Editorial Committee, and discussed and approved by the E.C. before circulation as an E.C. document. He does not mention the fact of the E.C.'s responsibility.

Comrade Trotman alleges that the E.C. statement contains an entirely false innuendo that Comrade Hayes is a "crypto-Labourite". The innuendo is entirely in Comrade Trotman's imagination, not in the E.C. statement. So much so that in order to back up his charge, Comrade Trotman attributes to the statement words that are not there. Comrade Trotman denies that Comrade Hayes "supported the Labour Party" - but the E.C. statement does not say, or imply, that he did (or that he supported the Tories). What it said was that Comrade Hayes' declared support for the Rent Control Acts "would in fact mean opposing both the Tory rent policy and the Labour Party rent policy."

The point is of importance, for if someone suggests that the S.P.G.B. should declare its support for a reform, the idea must be that the measure in question is going to be of practical use to the working class now: but what present practical use could there be in asking for something to which the Labour Party and Tory Party are opposed? (also the Liberal Party).

Comrade Trotman objects to a sentence in the E.C. statement which reads: - "Even if we assume that having to pay rent arrears, but being able to pay them after the due date, is a material advantage...". So he works off the jibe that I would not be so complacent if I had been threatened with eviction for arrears of rent. A silly argument; also two-edged. But what about the words? When the Editorial Committee drafted the statement, the intention was to convey by "material advantage", "important advantage", and presumably the members of the E.C. accepted it similarly. It is a quite common, dictionary use of the adjective "material".

The jibe about complacency is silly because it implies that if someone who is threatened with eviction opposes Comrade Trotman's views on Rent Control, he (Trotman) will give up his case. (He omitted to take the precaution of asking about members of the E.C. who are threatened with eviction.)

The argument is also two-edged. The housing reformers have found by experience (anticipated as long ago as 1923 by G.D.H. Cole in "Rents, Kings and Houses") that if the Government keeps rents very low they increase the number of dilapidated and slum houses. If I argued like Comrade Trotman I might say that if he had contracted tuberculosis or some other disease through living in an insanitary by-product of Rent Control, he would not be so complacent about that aspect.

It is, however, all irrelevant to the real question whether the Party should declare its support for rent control, delayed evictions, etc.

Comrade Trotman's next point is another alleged quotation. Comrade Trotman writes:-

"We are told that the party 'was opposed in principle to supporting reforms'. Note here the unobtrusive use of the past tense. Comrade Hardy should have told us the position today, unchanged since 1910 when Conference asserted that our I.P.'s would support reforms on their merits. This is hardly opposition in principle." (my emphasis)

Now note what the E.C. Statement actually contained and from which the words "was opposed in principle to supporting reforms"

the Party did not take the stand that it was opposed to having a programme of useless social reforms but should have a programme of reforms held to be of benefit to the working class. The Party took the stand that it would have no immediate demands. It repudiated in principle the S.D.F. policy of immediate demands (one of which incidentally was for low rented houses). Among the reasons why the Party was opposed in principle to supporting reforms were that to do so would attract reformists into the ranks of the Party and submerge its socialist objective."

(my emphasis)

Comrade Trotman's belief that the E.C. statement was phrased to cover up the past tense is due again to his imagination. The Party did not change its policies in 1910 and decide henceforward to support reforms. So the reasons why the Party rejected having a reform programme were equally valid in 1904, in 1910, and right up to date. What happened was that in 1910 the E.C. defined the Party's unchanged policy, in relation to the position of a Party M.P. faced with a measure actually before him in a capitalist dominated House of Commons. The policy was not a change, and it did not mean announcing advance support for a reform or adopting a programme of reforms.

The statement on the matter issued by the E.C. in August 1911 contained the statement.- "The E.C. therefore has simply upheld what has been the policy of the Party since its formation."

On one point the E.C. statement of August 1911 was narrowly specific. It said that on a measure in the House of Commons about which the question of voting arose, the position would have to be that "the complete measure would first have to be drawn up to avoid our being held responsible for, or expected to help, any fraudulent measure".

It is in the light of this that the reference to Comrade Mayes' (and Comrade Trotman's) desire to announce advance support of Rent Control will be seen to be very much to the point. The statement of 1910 (S.S. Feb. 1910) did not deal with that situation at all. What it did deal with was what a Socialist M.P. should do if presented with a cut and dried Bill in Parliament. The statement in the Feb. 1910 S.S. envisaged the situation that the capitalist parties in Parliament may initiate "measures that may conceivably contain some small advantage for the working class." Not, it will be observed, a campaign, or measures, to be initiated by us. Incidentally, the answer was a very cautious attempt to foresee a future possible situation, and the way socialists might instruct their delegates in Parliament to act.

So if Comrade Trotman now wants the Party to change its line and declare support for a reform on housing or rent control, he cannot bring it within the policy of the Party as defined without change in 1910.

Comrade Trotman objects to my article "Economics of Rent Control" (S.S. April 1957) because it did not deal with the current question of decontrol. Why should it? It was not meant to: other writers were dealing with that. Its purpose was to examine how rent control arose and what were its effects for workers and capitalists. I consider that it is a useful aid to understanding to see how something began and developed. Doesn't Comrade Trotman?

The E.C. statement on Rent Control had pointed out that a change which reduces the percentage of his wages that the workers spend on rent necessarily raises the percentage spent on other things. Comrade Trotman does not deny this, but he says that he cannot see the significance of the explanation made in the E.C. statement. That explanation pointed out that the case for the Party declaring its opposition to increased rents is just as much a case to declare our support for other reform proposals, including subsidies to reduce the price of food, clothing or travel.

and not be drawn also into the others?

Comrade Trotman gives some figures. He takes the case of workers whose rent is cut from £2 to £1 and whose wages remain unchanged at £10.

But where and when did a government do this? In my article I showed how the 1915 government, in furtherance of a government policy of restricting wages in war-time, enacted legislation on evictions and then rent control as a means of allaying workers' discontent and as a means of dissuading them from taking full advantage of labour shortage to press for higher wages. The evidence seems to be conclusive that the rent control policy then, and in the second world war and after, did help to dissuade workers from pressing their advantage.

This is, of course, the centre of the whole issue. The Party view has always been that it is on the industrial field that the workers can use organised struggle to maintain and increase real wages whenever conditions are to some extent favourable.

The Party has consistently supported that line. Governments oppose it and have used rent control as a propaganda weapon to undermine the workers' determination over the wage issue. One of the ways in which it has done this is by dividing the workers into groups, some with controlled or council houses at very low rents, others with council houses at higher rents, some in decontrolled houses or furnished apartments at extremely high rents. This has been a means of creating friction and divided views on wage issues.

Comrade Trotman says that pressing the wage struggle is inconsistent with the "Iron Law of Wages". Indeed it is, but here again it is Comrade Trotman's imagination, not anything in the E.C. Statement or my article that gave any support at all to the "Iron Law of Wages".

Comrade Trotman says that the Party ought to be telling the workers to fight for more pay, but also ought "to tell them to resist the decontrol of rents or any other encroachments on their living standards".

Will Comrade Trotman tell us what exactly he means by the latter? We are to tell the workers to struggle against Tory or Labour government or local council policies of rent raising. What exactly does Comrade Trotman envisage telling them to do?

Whatever it is, I hope it will be more useful than what Comrade Trotman told the workers in his Forum article. As against my view that the workers should struggle on the industrial field, Comrade Trotman gloomily dismissed the possibility that, with rents rising, workers could force up wages. Here was Comrade Trotman:-

"We do not wish to be prophetic, but we think it extremely unlikely. With the present increase in unemployment the reverse is to be expected."

He went on to mention the "unprecedented step" of the government vetoing the 3% agreement for Health Service staffs (this sort of thing is not unprecedented, incidentally). In fact this did not happen. The Health Service staffs, far from swallowing Comrade Trotman's view that it was hopeless, persisted in their struggle, including their overtime strike, and in due course they got more than the withheld 3%. And wages in other industries have also risen, including the engineers' settlement.

What is harmful, of course, is anything which weakens working class unity and determination by encouraging the idea either that the industrial struggle is useless or that it is less necessary because of rent control and other reforms.

In the current issue, and in the preceding one, reference is made to the controversy aroused by the Editorial Committee's reply to "W.B. of Upton Park" in the February 1910 Socialist Standard.

We believe that the documents relating to this controversy have a very real bearing on similar, though fortunately slighter, controversies in the Party today. In any event, they are of historic interest and define what has been the party's position on reforms and reformism since its inception. We are therefore reproducing the documents in full in this and the subsequent issue.

Editorial Committee

1. Reply to W.B. in February 1910 Socialist Standard.

W.B. (Upton Park) asks, what would be the action of a member of the S.P.G.B. elected to Parliament, and how would he maintain our principle of "no compromise"?

By compromise we understand "political trading", the "one of one principle" for example (see first page). The Socialist member of Parliament (while in the minority, of course), would advance the interests of the working class by caustic and enlightening criticism of capitalism in all its manifestations-political, industrial, educational, etc., etc. He would take every opportunity that offered to use this higher and well-heard platform as a means of spreading Socialist understanding.

His presence, backed, as it must needs be, by a wide-awake electorate (suggestive of more to come and the threatened "end of all") would in all probability evoke the initiation, by one or other of the capitalist parties, of measures that may conceivably contain some small advantage for the working-class. Now intellectual vitality requires the continual absorption and digestion of new facts as they occur. So with Socialism and proletarian politics. The S.P.G.B. is always ready to consider new facts and phases when these present themselves, and therefore the question of whether Socialist representatives should support any such measures in Parliament, is one that we do not, in January 1910, pretend to answer. We can only say as to this, that as we progress and new situations arise, our membership, ever guided by the revolutionary principle of NO COMPROMISE, by our general understanding of Socialism and the requirements of the greatest interest of the working-class, its emancipation, will DEMOCRATICALLY direct the action of its representatives. Each new situation, will have to be faced and Socialist action be decided upon the merits of the case. Meanwhile we may not claim rank with the Pope or Old Moore, and it should be understood that there is room for difference of opinion upon a matter that, at the present stage, is only of secondary importance. Our work to-day is to teach our fellow toilers their position and show them the indispensable steps they must take to win freedom. - (Ed. "S.S.")

2. The "Open Letter"

An Open Letter to the Members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain giving the Reasons for Demanding the Revocation of the Reply given to W.B. (Upton Park) in the February issue of the SOCIALIST STANDARD, 1910, concerning the Question "What would be the Action of a Member of the S.P.G.B., elected for Parliament?"

COMRADES,

The discussion on the above subject at the recent Annual Conference of our Party was attended by a comparatively small number of its membership. Hence we the undersigned deem it necessary to use this means of bringing our position to the cognisance of the bulk of our membership.

consider that in its essentials it contradicts our declaration of principles.

We hold that such reply in order to be consistent with our declaration of principles should contain no statements of a speculative character, but merely refer to our Declaration of Principles, as the basis of our tactics and policy, according to the positive knowledge and experience we possess, and the said question should therefore be answered in that light.

Looking at the question from that standpoint it is decidedly beside the mark to speak of "measures that may conceivably contain some small advantage for the working-class" or of our being "always ready to consider new facts and phrases when these present themselves," or "there is room for difference of opinion upon a matter that at the present stage is only of secondary importance".

As we are not prepared to give such replies concerning our attitude towards reforms and palliatives from platform and press, there is surely no reason why we should suggest that when our members enter Parliament they may possibly depart from our present position of no compromise.

But if on the other hand we as a Party hold, as several members alleged during the aforementioned discussion, that we have besides our "primary" object viz., Socialism, some "secondary" objects, which we, however, "keep in the background", then in order to be consistent we are bound to amend our Declaration of Principles and add to it the main items of reforms and palliatives which we consider we should have to support when proposed in Parliament. The attitude of supporting reforms or palliative measures on certain occasions in Parliament is more confusing and therefore far more dangerous than the out-and-out policy of reformers advocating such measures and embodying them in a programme from the very outset.

We deny altogether that a member of our Party is elected to Parliament for the purpose of taking part in any kind of legislation, whether by voting for it or against it. According to our Declaration of Principles the object of the working-class must be to obtain control of the political machinery and the S.P.G.B. advocate Parliamentary action as one of the possible means of achieving that end. That is possible only when the majority of the workers are revolutionary class-conscious. In the meantime the representatives of the S.P.G.B. can only, in the words of the first portion of the reply referred to, "advance the interests of the working class by caustic and enlightening criticism of capitalism in all its manifestations, political, industrial, educational, etc., etc." We fail to see that such criticism can possibly include our supporting measures that may be brought forward by any section of the capitalist class.

To us it is clear that all capitalist legislation is enacted for the purpose of keeping the capitalist system run smoothly in harmony with the economic development and the fact that the capitalist class in pursuance of such legislation are compelled to dig their own graves is certainly no reason for our supporting them through their measures and thereby admitting that at least at times they can become benefactors of the working class. In face of the economic laws dominating the capitalist system the capitalist class are as powerless to interfere with the economic development as the working class.

Those members of our Party who insist upon the possibility and necessity of our at times supporting capitalist measures divide the same under four different headings namely: (1) Rise in wages and general improvement in the working conditions; (2) Saving of life and limb of workers; (3) Political measures; and (4) Educational measures.

Now concerning the first heading, viz, "Rise in wages and general improvement in working conditions" we must point out that while we as Socialists recognise that the haggling for better conditions by the workers with their masters are inevitable expressions of the

debating of the working conditions between masters and wage-slaves constitutes action altogether apart from the Socialist position which aims solely at ending the wage slave conditions of labour and not at mending them. In fact the attempts at mending such conditions are unquestionably detrimental to our only object, viz. Socialism, which demands the most speedy abolition of wage slavery of the working class. And from our standpoint it is absurd to admit the possibility of regulating the working conditions of the wage-slave class by legislative enactments, seeing that we insist that such conditions are determined by three factors which defy all interference by legislation, namely, (1) the historically evolved standard of subsistence of the working class; (2) the law of supply and demand appertaining to labour-power like to every other commodity, and (3) the amount of resistance on the part of the workers against the encroachment of the capitalist. If legislation can also play a part in determining the conditions of wage-slave labour then we must in future insist upon a fourth factor, namely capitalist legislation, being added to above three factors.

Now as to the second heading viz., saving of life and limb of workers, we hold that a Socialist Party has no mandate to stand for the saving of life and limb of the workers under capitalism. Such attitude is indeed sufficiently sentimental as to attract a number of class-unconscious workers of the emotional type who for the purpose of the Social Revolution would only represent a most dangerous element of the working class.

Considering that in this country alone every year the capitalist system demands quite a hundred and twenty thousand victims of wounded and killed in the course of their employment, a Socialist Party would have its hands pretty full, were it to pursue as a "secondary" object the saving of life and limb of the workers. Besides, what is to be done "for the workers" must of necessity in the last resort be left to the discretion of the capitalist class, who, having the physical force of society at their command, can make or mar any measure, even if supported by the Socialists.

Coming to the third heading, viz. political measures, we observe with the greatest apprehension that members of our Party state that "as Socialists we are compelled to support such political measures as universal suffrage without property qualification and the Referendum. It is also alleged by these members that we must stand for the principles of Democracy under capitalism. Now these views are decidedly against the Socialist position. If "universal suffrage without property qualification and the Referendum" were a part of our Principles, we should have to admit that Socialism can be achieved only if the capitalist class are prepared to fully enfranchise the working class and to also count their votes, especially when a majority of them have become Socialists. Such position is worthy of reform parties such as the S.D.P., I.L.P., and Fabian Society, but is certainly contrary to the Principles of the S.P.G.B., which Party declares for the capture of political power by any means that the working class can enforce.

And regarding the fourth heading, viz., educational measures, it is a weak and illogical argument to allege that the workers are dependent for their enlightenment as to the Socialist position upon the capitalist class. It must not be forgotten that the capitalist class for the sake of keeping in harmony with the development of capitalism are compelled to open up ever new avenues of education to the Proletariat. But even if they were able to withhold such necessary education at will, the economic and political pressure on the workers would always outweigh the most bitter measures of persecution and boycott the capitalist class may think proper to enforce against the working class. And to admit the capitalist class to be the benefactors of the working class, because they are compelled by the economic development to weaken their stronghold, can only tend to efface the bitter hostility against the capitalist class required from the working class to finally vanquish their most deadly enemy.

able to enforce and administer after being passed with our aid, seeing that the capitalist class alone control the physical force required to uphold or render nugatory any measure that may be passed by the majority in Parliament?

As soon as the capitalist class would find out that we admit having to support certain legislative measures, they need only divide themselves into a number of factions, each adopting as its object one of the measures we must on our confession support, thus keeping us busy in backing up their legislation to such an extent that we should find precious little time to pursue our object, viz. Socialism.

If it is absurd to talk about suspending the class war it must be equally absurd to insist that there can be a suspension of hostility to the capitalist class by supporting some of their measures.

During the discussion of the subject at the Annual Conference it was pointed out that owing to the complexity of the capitalists system it may be necessary for the workers to support capitalist measures. Yet with all the growing complexity of the system the economic development enforces all the time the hostility between the exploiting and the exploited class. Here we devote many long speeches from our platform and numberless columns of our press to show the tendency of the workers ever getting poorer and the shirkers continually growing richer, and on the other hand we talk glibly about conceivable advantages for the working class.

In conclusion we sum up the position as follows:- We cannot see our way to support any pronouncement that admits the possibility of betterment in the conditions of the workers while they remain wage-slaves; or that alludes to the probability of the master-class helping at times the working class in their work of emancipation thus throwing great doubts on the correctness of the statement in our Declaration of Principles that "the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself," and finally we are unable to agree with the assertion that Socialists are sent to Parliament to assist in legislation, instead of working solely for obtaining control of the political machinery.

If the foregoing arguments appeal to you support us in our demand for a Referendum to revoke the said reply.

Yours fraternally

THE PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE for advocating the revocation of the reply given to W.B. of Upton Park, in the Socialist Standard for February 1910.

(Here followed the seven names of the committee members)

May 13th 1911.

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C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

The Party and Rent Control

Dear Comrades,

It would be interesting to know what Comrade Trotman is really after. At the present time the Party can only take a philosophical attitude to rent control - Whether it supported rent control or not, it is powerless to take any action. Is the idea that if the Party had representatives in Parliament, it should support rent control? By that time this question may be as dead as the dodo. Even supposing that it had representatives

hypothetical situations), if it supported rent control, it would be drawn into all the corollary positions, of advocating that landlords should be given an allowance for cost of repairs, that rents might be raised by a given amount (how much or percentage), that some or all houses should be taken over by the State, or that solitary tenants of six-roomed rent-controlled houses should be compelled to take in sub-tenants, and so on and so forth.

These are not problems for Socialists to deal with, recognising as we do that the whole housing problem is a problem of capitalism, and can only be solved by its abolition.

Comrade Trotman says we should tell workers to resist the decontrol of rents. We might just as logically ask them to agitate for lower prices (much the same thing), cheaper bread, free milk, more public lavatories, and so on.

Incidentally, some workers find themselves in opposition to rent control, e.g. those who are technically "landlords" and who have let part of their mortgaged houses to tenants whom they may consider no longer desirable for one reason or another, e.g. whose habits may have introduced dry-rot and damp-rot, but who, under the present rent-control legislation cannot legally be turned out. Such worker-owners feel quite vicious about it. Comrade Trotman would, I gather, have no sympathy with these unfortunate worker-landlords.

Yours fraternally,

R. M.

F O R U M N O . 4 .

The next issue of "Forum" will be published at the end of March. Contributions should be sent to the I.P.J. Committee at Head Office, if possible by the 1st of March.

The next issue will include an article on Philosophy by Comrade Coster; further documents relating to "W.B. of Upton Park"; Engels on the wages system, and other articles.

Editorial Committee

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